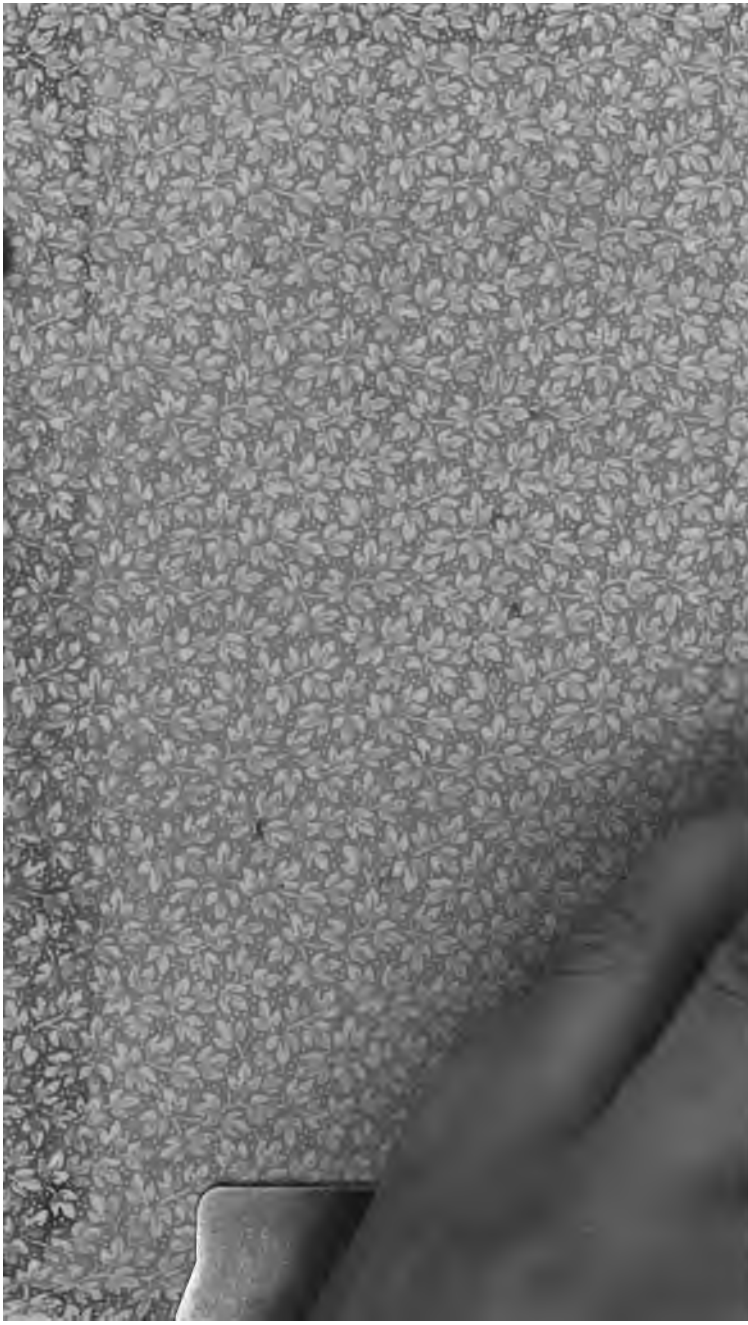
For Old Sake's Sake

BY

HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH



FOR OLD SAKE'S SAKE.

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A SKETCH.

BY

HON. MRS. FETHERSTONHAUGH,
AUTHOR OF
"KILCORRAN," "KINGSDENE," "ROBIN ADAIR,"
"ALAN DERING."

"Si jeunesse savait,
Si vieillesse pouvait!"

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PREFATORY NOTE.

IN order to avoid any charge of plagiarism being laid to my account, I wish to mention that the following sketch was originally suggested to me by Mr. W. S. Gilbert's ballad "Sweethearts," the Author of which has kindly sanctioned this prose version of his song.

MINNA FETHERSTONHAUGH.

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PART I.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO.

CHAPTER I.

RED ROSES.

"I have seen her—the summer in her soft hair,
And the blush rose husht in her face,
And the violet hid in her eyes!
And my heart, in love with its own despair,
Speeded each pulse's passionate pace
To that goal where pain is the prize."

FATALITY.

CHAPTER I.

RED ROSES.

WENTY-FIVE years ago. A quarter of a century, a third of a life-time for most of us, since the little world of Great Britain, rejoicing in peace and in plenty, "sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play," with no thought for the morrow, nor for what that morrow might bring forth.

True, rumours of a cloud no bigger

than a man's hand rising in the East, had somewhat disturbed the clear horizon of our land's summer sky; but what of that? And with only a few menacing growls the British Lion laid him down again to sleep.

Yet, ere long from North, East, and West was heard a sound of mighty rushing wings, as of flying eagles gathering together, but ere the carcase was ready for the spoilers, the Sick Man in despair turned his face from the East and cried unto the West with one last dying cry—so sadly pitiful in its desolate anguish that it pierced even to the ears of the

slumbering British Lion, and awoke him from sleep at last!

All this is now a matter of history, come and gone; a quarter of a century has passed and it is almost forgotten —like a dead man out of mind. Twenty-five years and more it is since Alma, Inkerman, Balaclava, and Sevastopol recorded their names in gold on many a regimental flag, and left still more ineffaceable records on a nation's heart. Twenty-five years have passed since the terrible day when high and low wept in bitter sympathy for those who had fallen in the fatal death-ride down the gun-crowned

Tchernaya valley ; when for ever was quenched the light of many a "stately home of England," and of many a cottage hearth,—and high and low, rich and poor, mingled in one great common sorrow,—mourned sadly, wearily, vainly, "for father, brother, son."

It was on a sunny day in June, about five-and-twenty years ago, that Ned Dundas rode merrily across the lea, with all his future—that "silver cord" with its many twists which we call life—as yet lying unravelled before him.

Tall, with a straight, well-set-up

figure, telling of drill sergeants, and barrack-yards, and marking him out unmistakably as a soldier, with curly brown hair, and frank blue eyes, the lad was a fair enough specimen of "England's noble sons." And it needed not the light whistle of "My love, she is like the red, red rose," which broke forth each instant from the merry mouth, only slightly shaded as yet by the golden-brown moustache hanging over it, to convince all whom it might concern, that Ned Dundas at least was one of those mortals to whom

> "The world was full of beauty then,
> As our hearts were free from care."

"If it wasn't such a glorious day, I'd say this expedition of mine was a deal too long to be pleasant," soliloquised he, as an endless vista of hot high-road stretched out before him with only an occasional tree at the road-side to cast its welcome shadow on the layers of gritty white dust that were stirred up in clouds by every stroke of his horse's hoofs. Being one of the principal coaching roads across the very heart of England, it had been widened and "Macadamised" to the fullest extent, by that benefactor to his country's weal (or perhaps it would be truer to say "wheels")

and now presented a flat, monotonous aspect, suggestive of mail-coaches and spanking teams, but most tiresome and objectionable to a good rider on an equally good hack.

"If there *is* a thing in life I hate, it's going on straight!" murmured Ned Dundas impatiently, breaking off in his musical tribute to an imaginary lady-love and kicking his heels into his unoffending little horse with vicious emphasis. "My pastors and masters have come to the same opinion, I believe," he laughed out cheerily, as his well-bred hack broke into a swinging canter that bid fair speedily to diminish

the length of the hot and dusty route lying before them.

"Now, I really see something that might prove to be the mansion I want!" exclaimed the young man, after ten minutes' steady riding had brought him to a turn in the road at last, and which disclosed some quite new features in the scene.

A somewhat pompous lodge-gate opened into a long grand avenue of lime trees, which wound its way slowly up to where on the crest of a high rising ground towered the stately grey walls of Forndon Abbey, from time immemorial the possession

of the Earls Palatine—since a crusade into the Holy Land had won for the first Lisle his spurs, his title, and these fair, broad lands.

The present possessor had sadly degenerated from those hot-blooded ancestors of his who were ever foremost in peace or war, field or council. John, Earl Palatine, was a simple-minded country gentleman, whose tastes lay exclusively in the farm and the kennel, and whose natural indolence of character had long gained for him the credit of being an utter nonentity. In the days when his wife had been alive, he had exerted

himself more, had taken greater interest in the business of his county and played his stake in the world with a firmer hand. For the late Countess Palatine had been *une maîtresse femme*, who held very decided views on women's rights and men's wrongs, and had perhaps been of some use in stirring the flame of duty which flickered so feebly in her husband's heart, into a clear, if small blaze.

Walking his horse quietly up the long avenue, the whole air heavily laden with the scent of the lime trees, which formed one grand and long

triumphal green arch above his head, Ned Dundas felt half awed by the sleepy solemnity of the whole place. The blinds in the high narrow windows of the house were all pulled down, not a sound could be heard either from within or without, no living thing seemed astir within its walls, and it was altogether as perfect a picture of some Castle Indolence, under the influence of an enchanted sleep, as could well be found on a hot summer's day.

"Where's the Sleeping Beauty, though, I wonder?" murmured Ned Dundas, not unnaturally. But nothing

in the guise of a female form greeted his inquiring gaze; and the echoing sound of the hall-door bell brought to the fore a very prosaic looking individual indeed, whose well-fed exterior and majestic calves entirely precluded any idea of an unnatural and unnurtured trance having ever been his portion.

The hack was led away to the stables, and Mr. Dundas was led through a long cool hall, bristling with rusty old spears and lances, where time-worn suits of armour hung on the walls in war-like array, and banners with strange armorial bearings

swept softly against them; until a door opened at the farther end, and he found himself ushered into a large and most drearily gorgeous apartment, evidently the state reception-room of Forndon Abbey.

As if the heavy, crimson, brocaded furniture, and the stiff formality of each tapestry chair, were not enough in themselves to strike terror into a beholder's heart and mind, the walls of the room were enlivened by a series of family portraits of most forbidding aspect, and which conferred an impression that a sulky frown or a demoniacal scowl were the distinguish-

ing characteristics of all defunct Lords and Ladies Palatine.

"This place is not over and above lively," observed Ned Dundas to himself, after a steady contemplation of the before-mentioned pictures had given him what he inwardly termed "decided creeps;" and straightway he walked towards the window, with the fond hope of finding the works of nature more exhilarating to his mind than the works of art, once more softly whistling, "My love, she is like the red, red rose."

But that well-worn air was this time destined never to be finished,

for at the end of the third bar Mr. Dundas had reached a large bay-window looking into the garden, and the sight which there met his gaze caused him abruptly to break off his whistling and give vent to a low and decided murmur of approbation.

A wide green terrace studded with flower-beds in which all the colours of the rainbow vied with each other; an old grey wall covered with mosses and lichen bordering this same green terrace; and seated thereon was a strikingly tall and graceful young girl, laughingly submitting to being crowned with a wreath of crimson

roses, which a small fair-haired child, standing on the wall beside her, was now holding as high above her head as its baby arms could reach.

It was certainly a pretty picture, this unconsciously artistic group, mainly composed of white dresses standing out in bold relief against an old grey wall, and dark hair crowned in royal red, and curly golden hair that shone in the light of the sun like the aureole of a saint — all combined together to enhance the brightness of the day and hour. And were an artist searching for a subject upon which to expend his skill, he might search for many a

day ere he found one more to his taste than the graceful picture now before him, Earl Palatine's only children.

"You must excuse my having kept you waiting so long, Mr. Dundas;" and a weak, kindly voice behind him made Ned turn round with a start, and reluctantly tear his eyes away from the scene which was being enacted in the garden outside. "When I heard a few days ago from my old friend Jim Dundas, that his nephew was quartered so near to this place, it gave me real pleasure to think that you would perhaps ride over some day to see us, and to tell me the latest news of him-

self, as well as enliven the solitude of a dull old man and two little girls."

All this was said in a quavering, gentle voice, whilst Lord Palatine's hand was laid kindly on the young man's shoulder, and his pale and colourless blue eyes were riveted on the latter's face with an embarrassed stare.

"No, you're not like your uncle, my boy—not a bit," he continued in a tone wherein disappointment made itself distinctly felt. "Ah! he was a merry little dark-eyed fellow, poor Jim, with as many airs and graces as a French dancing-master; and the women just ran wild after him, I can

tell you! But he was a sad dog, I'm afraid, was poor old Jim,—very sad, very sad; and perhaps it was all for his good that he was married by that determined widow Lady Susan at last, and dragged to and fro on the face of the earth at her will. Well, well, they say a good wife is 'far above rubies,' don't they? and, of course, we must believe it, my dear boy; and I'm sure that I for one found it so—yes, yes, of course I did."

The sudden dimpling of the faded old face, and emphatic rubbing of the weather-beaten brown hands, which accompanied the conclusion of Lord

Palatine's rambling speech, might have led outsiders to doubt whether the jewel so far above rubies of which he had been deprived by death had, after all, proved such an irreparable loss to his comfort and peace of mind; so his young visitor contented himself with uttering a few vague platitudes, suitable, as he said to himself, "for any point of view."

"But my daughters, you haven't seen my daughters, Mr. Dundas!" and now, indeed a radiant smile lit up the feeble old face. Evidently his two children were the sunshine of Lord Palatine's heart.

"I think I saw them in the garden just now," answered Ned Dundas in an almost shy tone, as inwardly he wondered whether their attached parent had seen and noted the abstracted gaze that had riveted his eyes on the fascinating little scene which so lately had been enacted on the terrace outside.

"Oh, I dare say; they live out of doors this weather; one can never find them anywhere else. Come along, come along, and we'll go out to them;" and off shuffled the undignified little figure, clad in shooting-coat and gaiters which had seen many a year's

wear and tear, and followed by the tall, good-looking young soldier, whose symmetrical figure and well-cut clothes were shown to full advantage by the contrast.

Apparently some one else thought so too—for the young lady who was still seated on the wall sprang up in haste, and tore her wreath of roses off with reckless hand, striving vainly to reduce her tangled dark hair to order, as is the fashion of the weaker sex when desirous of appearing to advantage before the stronger.

"This is my eldest daughter, Lady Margaret; and *that* is baby Nina," said

the old man, pointing to a fair-haired child, beautiful as a dream, which was trying hard to hide its golden head in its sister's protecting skirts.

Lady Margaret's merry dark eyes met the young man's admiring gaze with great fortitude on the whole; and he felt so decidedly the more shy of the two, that he forthwith devoted his whole attention determinedly to the little two-years-old Nina, who, however, declined his advances in the most positive manner.

"Maggie, you must persuade our young friend to come over and stay with us some day if he will?" said

Lord Palatine, in his shy, hesitating manner.

"You will, won't you?" and merry Maggie Lisle's dark eyes softened dangerously, as she lifted them courteously towards those of her guest.

Lady Margaret was only sixteen, but a merrier and more wilful lassie ne'er drew breath. Her pale bright face was all ablaze with expression, her dark eyes flashed like fire when she was speaking, or in animation; and yet she had no real beauty of feature to depend upon, only the truest type of perfect nobility and refinement. It

needed no very accurate observation to prophesy that, as years went on, Lady Margaret's beauty would pale as starlight before sunlight, when compared to that of her little sister, the baby Nina. For the lovely blue eyes, veiled in lashes nearly half-an-inch long, the rosebud mouth, the shy sweet smile of the younger child, made already a striking contrast to the stern proud expression which too often marred the sweetness of Maggie Lisle's bright face. And yet a physiognomist would scarcely have hesitated to award the palm rather to that "rare, pale Margaret" than to the

beautiful, soulless face of the little baby-girl Nina.

That Mr. Dundas should unhesitatingly accept the invitation which was conveyed to him in so charming a manner was not to be wondered at; and a severe blow was given to his spirit when the melancholy fact had to be declared, that ere the week was out the whole *ménage* of Forndon Abbey would be removed to the far north of Scotland, not to return until autumn should have set her seal upon summer.

Therefore the invitation would perforce stand over for a time, and

Mr. Dundas cantered back to barracks in a more irate frame of mind than so small a trifle would appear to warrant. But, strange to say, the tune which had clung to his lips so persistently all the day, seemed nearer now to his mind than ever, and a shadow of more than ordinary meaning seemed to hover around the old time-honoured words, "My love, she is like the red, red rose!"

CHAPTER II.

HALLOWEEN.

"Thou shalt touch and make redder his roses
With juice not of fruit nor of bud;
When the sense in the spirit reposes,
Thou shalt quicken the soul through the blood.
Thine, thine, the one grace we implore is,
Who would live and not languish or feign,
O sleepless and deadly Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain."

DOLORES.

CHAPTER II.

HALLOWEEN.

TO tell the plain and unvarnished truth, so often is human nature opposed to the admirable sentiment "absence makes the heart grow fonder," that when autumn came round once more in its golden-brown glory of dying leaves and fading year, Ned Dundas had quite forgotten that such a place as

Forndon Abbey existed on the face of the earth, let alone that it might contain any sort of attraction for his careless young spirit. So it was with a feeling of momentary surprise that he opened and read one morning an epistle written in a scrawling uncertain hand, the purport of which proved itself to be an invitation from Lord Palatine to himself, to dine and stay all night at the Abbey, an invitation which, all the same, Mr. Dundas unhesitatingly accepted.

Eight p.m. on the day mentioned saw him enter the stately drawing-room at Forndon Abbey once more—

there to be còrdially welcomed by his host, and to be immediately introduced to his deputy hostess, the Lady Alicia Lisle, a maiden sister of the former—to whom rumour vaguely assigned a mind and heart as full of acerbity as was expressed in her thin-lipped sour face.

This was scarcely what Ned Dundas had been led to expect, and with scant courtesy he turned hurriedly away from the uninviting glance which that lady now bent on him and said half shyly: "But your daughters, Lord Palatine? I do not see my little friend Nina anywhere?"

"Nina? Oh! she's gone to bed," observed his host absently; and Mr. Dundas felt that his deceptive question had met its just reward. Nor did he dare hazard any further inquiry respecting the Ladies Lisle, whilst the cold grey eye of their maiden aunt transfixed him with the unpleasant stare habitual to that lady.

All through dinner Mr. Dundas's temper continued of the vilest. He felt outraged and deceived—though, as the *menu* promised not more than it fulfilled, and the champagne proved itself quite above suspicion, it were difficult to say what cause there was

to justify the ruffled state of his soul. His neighbours also suffered in consequence of this abstraction of his mind; for an eloquent young damsel in pink, with a "fringe" so deep it might more justly be described as a "valance," which was supposed to lend expression to eyes that already appeared little lacking in that much-abused power, after trying him on every subject from poetry to pug-dogs, gave it up in despair, and never in after-life alluded to him in any other terms than as "that stupid ape I met at Lord P——'s."

Nor did the elderly dowager seated

on the other side of him fare much better, either conversationally or otherwise; for after he had twice passed her the cayenne pepper in mistake, and twice rectified the anguish thereby caused with copious tumblers of cold water, and had listened resignedly to her tearful enumeration of all the diseases connected with choking to which the human frame is liable—he resolutely drew a line at also hearing an account of all the infantile diseases to which her own progeny in particular had been subject in their days of babyhood, thereby earning for himself her

afterwards expressed encomium, "A nice-looking youth, perhaps, but no manners, my dear—no manners."

Whilst Mr. Dundas was thus earning for himself a rich reward of black looks and ungracious words, the *primum mobile* of all his ill-temper was seated comfortably over the drawing-room fire alone, awaiting the entrance of her father's lady guests from the dining-room.

Even the orthodox high white muslin dress which Lady Margaret wore failed to stiffen or mar the outline of her tall, rounded figure, or totally to conceal the fair white arms

and shoulders which shone through its envious folds like snow through mist.

Just on the eve of that important era in a girl's life termed "coming out," just on the verge of womanhood, a fairer and nobler picture of a high-born English girl could scarce be found than bonnie Margaret Lisle.

So thought *one* of her father's guests at least, when, in holding open the door to allow of the procession of dames entering into their sanctuary, he caught a glimpse of a half-risen figure, tall and graceful as a reed on a mountain tarn, which not only

rendered him perfectly oblivious of the pink young lady's last dying efforts to subjugate him by the effect of her eyes and fringe, united in one supreme effort of nature and art, but even caused him absently to shut the door on the last yard and a half of the said pink frock; which mishap occasioned a remark to fall from those beautiful lips that it was as well the closed door concealed from his guilty ears.

Lord Palatine's well-known and highly valued Chateau Lafitte might have been *vin ordinaire* of the commonest description, for all the attention it received from his youngest

guest after this; and Ned Dundas was one of the very earliest to make his appearance in the drawing-room, where, judging from a casual view, dulness seemed to reign supreme.

But that was a matter of small moment in his eyes just then, for was not sweet Margaret Lisle sitting on a sofa close to him?—one of those sofas, too, which must have been intended by even the most prosaic of upholsterers for a social *tête-à-tête*, and it was not long ere it found itself being put to the use for which it seemed to have been formed.

"Do you know, I've been wonder-

ing and wondering so where you were?" begins the boy eagerly, stroking his moustache, and trying to look dignified all the same. "I didn't eat a bit of dinner!" he concludes mournfully.

"I'm so sorry," and Maggie's mischievous, dancing eyes rather belie her words. "But you'll make all the better breakfast to-morrow morning, you know: you are going to stay the night, aren't you?"

"Yes, thank goodness!" and they both laugh, from sheer gaiety of spirit and a pleasant feeling of reciprocal sympathy.

"Are you coming to the ball at S——, next week, Lady Margaret?" inquires Ned Dundas anxiously.

"Oh no. I'm not 'out' yet, you know. I shall have to wait till next summer, when father says he'll give a ball on my birthday, quite for my own self to come out at!"

"I hope you'll ask me to 'come out' at the same one, then; you will, won't you?"

"Men don't 'come out,'" laughs Maggie, "they're never 'in.' I must say, I think they are much to be envied!"

"Well, I don't know; one so soon

gets tired of everything, that the sooner one begins one's pleasures, the sooner one gets through them—so the wise people say."

"Are you a wise person?" asks Lady Margaret demurely.

"Do you mean, have I got through my pleasures yet? Assuredly no!" and the speaker's frank, cheery laugh does one good to hear. "I think life well worth having still, and the world not at all a bad one; and you'll think so too, Lady Margaret, when you come to try it."

"May be," answers Margaret absently.

"And my creed in life is: Get as much fun out of it as you can, whilst the sun is shining, and you are still young. The days of darkness will come quite soon enough to most of us, 'when all the world is old, lad, and all the wheels run down.'"

"You are not a *blasé* young man, that's a comfort," says Maggie wickedly. "Ingenuous freshness is a thing of the past, Aunt Alicia says; but she can't know *you*."

"No, the sooner life comes the sooner it will go; I've no fear of that fickle goddess Fortune!" and the

speaker's merry laugh speaks volumes for his experience of happiness in the past and confidence in the future.

"I like your confidential faith in Dame Fortune," answers Lady Margaret, laughing lightly. "And I'll also own that I agree with your views from the bottom of my heart. what *can* life bring save everything that's nice? Including even my birthday ball, in time!" she adds ecstatically.

"Dundas!" and Lord Palatine's voice made the young man start and hastily remove his entranced gaze from the countenance of Lord Pala-

tine's daughter, "did I hear you say just now that you were in want of a first charger?"

"Yes, unluckily, I am. The old horse I've been riding charger of late broke his knees all to smithereens two days ago, so I've the pleasure of looking out for another."

"Well, you might take a look at a young one of mine to-morrow morning before you go farther afield. He's a little too like a hunter, perhaps, for what you want; but there's not much fault to be found with his looks, and you might go farther and fare worse. Anyway I

know he's five years old, and sound and quiet, for I bred him myself, and he's never been off the place; but I'm too old to ride anything but my own cob now, and Maggie here turns up her nose at this horse for some reason or other—I suppose his colour is wrong, or his tail too short, eh, Maggie ?"

"Neither the one nor the other, you very impertinent old father!" said Lady Margaret, pinching her paternal parent with a good hearty pinch of reprobation. "No, 'Royalist's' colour is perfect, Mr. Dundas, and his tail is perfection too, I can assure you ; but I happen to have another old horse that I am

very fond of, and I *won't* give up old favourites for new," said the girl staunchly.

"Well, my lady, as you won't keep him for yourself, I suppose you have no objection to letting Mr. Dundas try him, have you?" asked her father facetiously.

"Of course not. And I hope you may like him, Mr. Dundas; for though I am accused of not appreciating his merits, I like the horse extremely all the same."

Verily was now that noble charger's fate clearly sealed; and had any further inducement to his purchase

been wanting it would have been clenched by the unconscious father's next remark :

"I'll have him ready for you to look at to-morrow morning after breakfast, then ? And Maggie, you might ride with Mr. Dundas as far as Barton Heath, and show him that long mile of good galloping-ground you are so fond of introducing poor old 'Chevalier' to, and then he can send the young horse along a bit and try him better."

"Very well, father," said Lady Margaret in an absent tone, and wholly unmindful of the pleased

expression which now reigned over Ned Dundas's face. "But, father dear, you've forgotten all about to-night!" and Maggie's uplifted hands and eyebrows betokened some grievous and calamitous omission.

"What about to-night, my dear? Oh! I know, you mean it's All Hallow's Eve? But we can't have that nonsense to-night, can we, my dear, with strangers here?"

"Oh, we *must*, father—I wouldn't lose the chance for the world!" and Lady Margaret's face assumed an expression of mingled disappointment and dismay which proved far too

much for her fond and feeble parent's heart.

"Well, well, my dear, have it your own way. Only for Heaven's sake wait until old Mrs. Crabapple and all her party are gone, else she'll vote me a bigger old fool and you a more wilful lassie than is the case."

"What does your father mean? And what is it that is going to happen?" inquired Mr. Dundas curiously, when that worthy old gentleman had toddled away to entertain some more important, if less pleasant, guest.

"What's going to happen is this: that we shall troop off to the library by-and-by, when the clock is on the stroke of twelve, there to learn our matrimonial fate for all time to come!" and Lady Margaret laughed gaily at the puzzled face of her auditor.

"I am more than ready to learn my matrimonial fate, Lady Margaret," he answered, with a good deal of earnestness in his voice.

"Well, then, all you have to do is this: the whole room will be more or less in darkness, except for a dim light which will be thrown

on a certain mirror placed at the farther end of it; before this you must take your stand, and wish very, *very* hard that you may see in the glass a reflection of your future wife's face. And if (like 'the Marchioness') you 'make believe' very much indeed, it is just possible that you really *may* see it; such at least is the tradition of Halloween."

"I like the idea," said Mr. Dundas with alacrity, and speculating privately how much of cheating would be possible on the occasion, the better to secure the right face in the mirror at the right moment.

When most of the guests had departed, the remainder, headed by Lady Margaret Lisle, swept joyously out of the warm, brightly-lit drawing-room and across the hall, into the library beyond.

This was a long, sombre apartment, cold and inexpressibly dreary, and it needed no mysterious terror of supernatural influences to render its visitors chill and uncomfortable in the extreme.

A weird and ghostly light played on the mirror at the farther end of the room, whereon faint shadows came and went as if truly some

spirit of prophecy were breathing on it now and then. One by one, old men (if bachelors) and maidens, old maids and young men, advanced solemnly to the mystic spot, and apparently returned very little wiser than they went; with the exception of the young lady in pink afore-mentioned, who, if she received no ghostly benefit from her peep into the glass, received a very material one by ascertaining that a lock of hair had come loose at the back of her head, and a lock, moreover, which to tremble meant to fall. So she returned with a smile of

satisfied contentment on her face, and gave way to Ned Dundas, whose turn it was at last to approach the magic mirror.

"Lady Margaret, do please tell me how I must stand?" he urged in a voice of piteous entreaty and bewilderment, thereby hoping to secure a glimpse of the coveted face his soul was longing for.

But he started back, as over his shoulder he saw reflected in the mirror a face indeed of sweetest loveliness, though not Lady Margaret's own, and a clear child's voice rang out gleefully: "I see 'ou, I see 'ou!"

echoed by a merry peal of laughter from the elder sister, whom, as he turned, he beheld standing close behind him with the baby Nina in her arms.

"Oh, Nina, Nina, Maggie's a very naughty girl to go and get you out of bed at such an hour as this!" exclaimed her father in his foolish, fond old voice, taking the beautiful little domestic tyrant out of her sister's arms, and wrapping the pale blue shawl which covered the child's night-dress more closely around her.

"Here, nurse! take this young lady away;" and young Lady Nina

was borne off with all the honours of the day, for to her, and to her alone, had been vouchsafed a tangible glimpse into the prophetic mirror of Halloween.

CHAPTER III.

OVER THE OPEN.

"I remember how merry a start we got,
When the red fox broke from the gorse,
In a country so deep, with a scent so hot,
That the hound could outpace the horse;
I remember how few in the front rank show'd,
How endless appeared the tail,
On the brown hill-side, where we crossed the road,
And headed towards the vale."

LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER III.

OVER THE OPEN.

"ROYALIST," by "Merry Monarch" (winner of the Derby of 1845), did not, in appearance at least, belie his lineage; and as he played lightly with his bit, champing the foam thereon into unnecessary froth, and bent his lean, blood-like head under the firm quiet hand of his new rider, Mr. Dundas felt that he was on a

horse which possessed more merit than the mere fact of his surroundings could have answered for. Dark bay, with two white heels, powerful enough to pull a brougham, and yet a well-bred gentleman, every inch of him, the young five-year-old was indeed a horse not to be despised; and Ned Dundas, following in the wake of the staid old chestnut Chevalier, who carried his bonnie mistress as cheerfully as if his aged frame were not already tottering very near the grave, rode down the now leafless lime avenue, towards the Lodge-gates, with a mind

at least equally divided between the good horse under him, and the fair face before him.

"Do you like him?" asked Lady Margaret anxiously, as they pulled up after a long trot down the broad straight road along which Mr. Dundas had once so impatiently ridden on the day of his first arrival at Forndon Abbey.

"Yes; he moves well, and feels nice and strong under one. But let's walk now until we get on to some grass, won't you? We'll have a good gallop then."

"Very well, we will. But it's best

to go through this gate on the right, if you'll open it, please, and down the long bridle-road which you can just see crossing that farther hill, and then we shall get to the piece of galloping-ground which father told you of last night."

So they turned off the great high-road which led to London and the world, and rode adown the green lane which led to nowhere; the big, strong bay horse pacing along quietly and contentedly by the side of his aged stable companion, the boy talking brightly and happily to the merry girl beside him.

It was still early, and an eleven o'clock sun in late October has little power in its rays, so though old Sol did his fiercest and best with what little might the shadowy autumn-time had left him, he could do little more than just silver each blade of grass and leaf, covered in their pure white hoar-frost shrouds, or rest lovingly on some patch of red-brown fern, which had bent but not broken beneath the harsh sway of the Winter King.

Ned Dundas was conscious of a strong feeling of unusual diffidence; nay, almost shyness. Not that it was at all a characteristic of this young

soldier's, but somehow all his ideas seemed failing him just at this critical moment when he would have given worlds to outshine every other mortal or immortal man that ever tried to charm the ear of woman.

It was no use denying, even to himself, that two-thirds of his mind and very nearly the whole of his heart were irrevocably fixed on fair Margaret Lisle; else why should the moments spent at her side seem such unutterable bliss, and the coming separation looming before them seem such unutterable woe?

Very few in this world would be

prepared to deny the strange fact that just *one* face in a crowd can alter the whole earth to us. The faintest glimpse thereof can brighten the very darkest spot, and would brighten even Hades; *not* to see it renders every corner of the world dull and void, and every so-called pleasure becomes a pain, for lack of the one "open, Sesame," to our heart's real joy. And some such strange fitful power was even now knocking at the hitherto unvanquished heart and soul of gay Ned Dundas, and impatiently he tried to carve out in his mind a future full of golden promise and sunny

hopes, recklessly ignoring the fact that there is but one croupier who can call out the varying chances of Life's great game, and say shall it be "for" or "against" us, and that is Time.

"I wish I were not going away!" he sighed dolefully, and felt somewhat emboldened by the honest and genuine regret apparent in his companion's voice as she answered:

"*Are* you going away? Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Yes, on Monday next. You see, I hadn't quite money enough to hunt this winter, and so when

Bernard Martini—he's in the Rifles, a real good fellow, and a crack shot, you know—asked me, 'Would I like to go abroad with him in his yacht, first to the Mediterranean and then to shoot woodcock in Corsica,' of course I *jumped* at the invitation, and who wouldn't ?'

"Of course, who wouldn't ?" echoed Lady Margaret demurely.

"But now I wish to Heaven I had never said I'd go !" murmured the perturbed and enamoured young man, conscious that if he lost his head and betrayed his passion at this early stage of their acquaintance,

the chances were strongly in favour of his getting off but second best at the hands of merry Maggie, and yet whilst he was meandering o'er the sunny seas, might not a rival appear on the scene and carry off his fair one? Oh, horrid thought!

"I *hate* shooting, too!" he continued to himself in a plaintive *sotto voce*, "and crack shots are always jealous, and the climate is sure to be beastly, and the weather worse, and oh—*damn* Martini!"

"Did you speak?" inquired Lady Margaret courteously.

"No—that is—not much. The

fact is, Lady Margaret, I'm more cut up at having to go away just now than I can put into words, and that makes me stupid, you see!"

"Yes, I see," and Maggie's merry eyes twinkled dubiously.

"And by the time I get back to England, the regiment will have left its present quarters, and they say we are to go to that dreadful wilderness called Aldershot, where the authorities are thinking of building a camp, I believe."

"You'll never be alive long!" pronounced Maggie with decision.

"No," said Mr. Dundas with

mournful acquiescence; "shall you be sorry, Lady Margaret? By Jove! is it—yes, it *is* a fox!" and a sudden change came o'er the spirit of his dream.

Sure enough, hastily but warily a fine old fox has jumped out of the hedgerow on their left, into the road, which he crosses in hot haste on seeing their sudden proximity to himself; and though he is dirty and travel-stained, the pace at which he breasts the rising ground beyond it and disappears over the sky-line with a contemptuous lift of his white-tipped brush, bids fair to dis-

tance any pursuers, even those relentless four-footed ones which are even now counting upon his death.

Nearer and nearer, with stealthy untiring feet, comes a pack of grimly beautiful foes, thirsting for his life, and every hound's voice, as now and again one or other gives tongue, resounds on the still autumn air like some wild cry for "blood."

There is a momentary hesitation in the adjoining field, and then the pack bursts into the road before them, causing even staid old Chevalier to prick his ears with all the fire of youth in his eyes, whilst the stately

young five-year-old forgets himself so far as to caper on his hind-legs like a circus horse, and even to snort excitedly at an unwary puppy which has approached too near his heels in anxious attention to its proper duties.

An old lemon-and-white lady, the best hound in the pack, and the ugliest, suddenly proclaims in the shrill loud cry habitual to her, that she has an idea and means to act upon it. A chorus of voices from "sisters, cousins, and aunts" proclaims a general assent, and ere the huntsman, and one or two more men

with him, have time to catch their horses by the head and rattle them at the good wide fence which intervenes between them and the hounds, the latter have crashed through the farther hedgerow in the wake of their leader, and are speeding over the rising ground which only a few moments before had been so gallantly breasted by their hated enemy and much-longed-for victim.

"Can he jump, your horse?" asks Ned Dundas hurriedly, involuntarily shortening his reins as he speaks and settling his hat more firmly on his head.

"Of course he can!" retorts Chevalier's owner indignantly; "and I know that *your* horse was out with hounds constantly last year," she adds suggestively.

"Then we'll just have a spurt for a field or two!" exclaims Mr. Dundas with joy. "I'm determined this horse shall be mine, so I don't mind risking him."

Yet, though he had no compunctions anent Lord Palatine's young horse, he had some few with regard to the safety of Lord Palatine's daughter; but the steady and careful manner in which her horse jumped

the first fence out of the road, without betraying a shade of the unnecessary excitement which caused "Royalist" to sadly over-jump himself at the same small obstacle, made him feel great confidence in the old chestnut's powers of taking care of his young mistress and himself.

Being the cub-hunting season only, there were but few people out hunting at all, and fewer still with the hounds. For as the huntsman, wiry old Dick Foxholes, told Mr. Dundas in short gasps of speech, interspersed with many a dig of the spurs and "*Come* up, 'oss!" to his jaded grey—the

hounds had got away with an old fox in the open, before anyone could stop them—"and a rum dance the varmint's led us, capting, over the blindest and blunderingest country as ever I see'd, and that's all about it!" growled the veteran, in conclusion, divided between a proper pride in the excellence of the run itself and a well-authenticated fear that the old grey and himself would never live to see the end of it.

The country which now lay before them was wild and open, the fences, though strong, a long way apart, and grass everywhere. A grand

country to ride across on a fresh horse, with a good turn of speed in him; a terrible country to face on a tired one, with scarcely an effort left in his wearied limbs.

So Ned Dundas, with Lady Margaret close behind him, sits down to cut out the work in due form, his five-year-old cracking a top rail or weakening a binder at almost every fence, an attention for which old Dick on his tired grey feels profoundly thankful, as he struggles on gamely in their rear, his superior knowledge of the country helping him to many a useful nick.

At last there is a momentary check, and their sobbing horses get their wind again, as Dick Foxholes urges the old grey into a gentle trot, which is all that is left in the poor brute now, and tries to get near enough to assist his treasured ones. But once more old "Harridan's" shrill voice rings out in unmusical exultation, as she hits off the line again without mistake; and in two seconds the whole pack are streaming away towards a high piece of ground visible in the distance, along which is stealing *something* that makes the flock of sheep in that corner fly apart and

scatter right and left, staring in wild affright.

With a groan Dick Foxholes takes his horse short by the head and tries to follow "Royalist" over a low rail with a widish ditch on the landing side; but the old grey's bolt is shot. Too honest to refuse, too cunning to hit the timber, he just throws himself over the latter, and leaving both hind-legs in the ditch, rolls placidly on to the grass, where it is very evident that he will for some time remain.

The huntsman scrambles on to his legs, but ere he has time to curse his prostrate charger, Ned Dundas

has jumped off "Royalist," and offers him to the old man with determined insistance. In less than three minutes hounds, huntsman, and all have disappeared like some dream when daylight breaks; and not until Mr. Dundas's new first charger was brought back to Forndon Abbey some hours later, with the proud but weary honour of "being the only horse there when the fox was run into," did anyone know aught of the issue of that merry gallop "over the open."

"Do you think he'll die?" asked Lady Margaret anxiously, casting a

frightened glance at the recumbent form of the huntsman's grey, as the latter lay tranquilly on the grass with his sides heaving.

"Not a bit of it; he's only blown. By Jove! I feel quite like that sportsman in history (or was it in Walter Scott?) who killed his gallant grey and then made sonnets on him!"

"You mean the Knight of Snowdon, James Fitz-James," said Lady Margaret rebukingly.

"Of course; that's him! And I remember the lines now:

"'Woe worth the chase, woe worth the day,
That costs thy life, my gallant grey!'"

concluded Mr. Dundas, proud of his learning.

This was more than the defunct courser could stand, and with a few preliminary grunts he scrambled up on to his legs and stared reproachfully at the company at large.

A peal of laughter greeted the veteran's expected resuscitation, and leading him by the bridle, Mr. Dundas prepared stoutly to face the long walk home which was in store for him.

"I'm sorry you've lost the rest of the hunt, though," he said apologetically to his companion; but Maggie disclaimed all wish to have gone on

any further, were it only for sake of the "Chevalier's" aged limbs.

"We'll finish our day yet, Lady Margaret!" said Ned Dundas gaily. "I shan't consider we've had a real hunt together until we see the end of a run as well as the beginning."

"Very well. But that's a bargain you must make with Fate, Mr. Dundas, not with me," laughed his hearer.

And then their talk drifted into a general discussion on life and all things connected therewith — people, places, theories, facts—and the many hundred subjects which spring natu-

rally to the lips where hearts are bright and trusting—and where one of the speakers, at least, feels that the golden moments which are passing so quickly by will remain for ever enshrined in his soul.

And she? Well, it were hard to say what were the thoughts now dwelling in the deep true heart of Margaret Lisle. But of a certainty there was an unwonted softness in her bright dark eyes, and an unusual gravity about her laughing mouth, as she talked or listened eagerly to her companion of the hour; and for the rest of that day a wistful serious-

ness was visible on her pale face, such as had heretofore been a stranger to it.

Perhaps the "Chevalier" had proved less easy to ride than usual — perhaps she was tired and overdone; but true it was, that on seeking her couch that night she shed many tears of strange import—the first real tears which as yet had ever brought the shadow of a rain-storm into her sunny life.

CHAPTER IV.

WHITE ROSES.

"Is there place in the land of your labour?
Is there room in your world of delight,
Where change has not sorrow for neighbour,
And day has not night?"

SWINBURNE.

"Yet with steady lip, and with fearless eye,
And with cheek like the flush of dawn,
Unflinchingly she spoke in reply—
'Go hence with the break of morn;
I will neither confess, nor yet deny,
I will return thee scorn for scorn.'"

FAUCONSHAWE.

CHAPTER IV.

WHITE ROSES.

"I THINK this is the valse you promised me long ago, Lady Margaret;" and Maggie Lisle starts and looks round with a sudden gleam of brightness in her dark eyes, as a tall young soldier bends anxiously over the little white-and-gold ball-card she holds in her hand, and on which she is rapidly inscribing name after name of the

many attentive partners crowding round her. For summer has come round once more, and it is the night of Lady Margaret's so long promised "birthday ball," on which occasion also that young lady is to make her first *début* in society.

Absolutely regal does Lady Margaret look to-night, with the glitter and glare of innumerable wax-lights lighting up her pale face and dark hair, crowned with a wreath of snow-white roses, long trails of the same flower being dispersed about her simple white tulle dress. Her out-of-the-common height and the some-

what stately turn of her proudly carried head tend to make her the most distinguished-looking girl in all that festive crowd, though her claim to any extraordinary beauty might be open to a shade of doubt. But on one point were *all* agreed, whether old or young—that bonnie Maggie Lisle was the merriest and most winsome lassie ever seen, and proud indeed should be the envied man who would one day win this peerless maiden for his wife.

Perhaps this was the reason why so great a number of aspiring partners were crowding round her now,

soliciting her favour with far more anxiety than is usually exhibited by the imperturbable "golden youths" of Great Britain; for to all those who were gathered beneath the roof of Forndon Abbey that night this bright young girl was a novelty and an unexpected surprise—so many years had passed since the world had seen much of Lord Palatine or Lord Palatine's daughter. And to be *new* is everything in this world of ours, where the craze for novelty grows stronger year by year and day by day; where broken hearts are so speedily mended, broken vows so soon

renewed—where the friends of yesterday will no longer be the friends of to-morrow—where the Past cedes its place to the Present, and for ever

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new."

One person in the world seemed, however, to hold a diverse opinion to this generally received truth; for the heroine of the hour was lavishing her brightest smiles and sunniest glances on the only old friend whom she could count amongst the many new ones surrounding her. And though they had met but twice since Mr. Dundas's

return from abroad, it was very evident that so great a distance lay between that most light-hearted of Light Dragoons and his heavier rivals, that the latter speedily made up their minds to achieve a masterly retreat from a field whereon victory was denied them.

So Ned Dundas felt as if half the stronghold were already stormed and won, as skilfully he steered his graceful "proud ladye" round the room to the strains of the "First Love" valse, the very name of which appeared to his enamoured soul to be fraught with a strange, intoxicating significance;

and at last, in acquiescence with his fervent request for "one short stroll in the garden, *only* one"—half in pleasure, half in fear, Margaret Lisle steps out into the moonlight and finds herself enjoying a lonely *tête-à-tête* with her true love, for the first time.

That a wealth of bright moonlight is silvering every tree and flower, bringing out in strange relief the weird black shadows on the old Abbey walls, and bathing in one wide glorious sheen all things in heaven and earth, is a fact which is completely lost on their pre-occupied souls. And as

they stand leaning against the moss-covered terrace wall, whereon, the day he first beheld her, had sat, rose-crowned, this "rare pale Margaret," the young soldier's heart flies to his lips, and with more coherence than might have been expected on the whole, he pleads anxiously for some slight return of the fervent and adoring love which he so lavishly now lays at her feet.

But a spirit of mischief seems to have come over Maggie Lisle to-night, or perhaps the adulation and incense offered at her shrine has done its work on her pure honest heart; for

she hesitates now, and will give him no answer—will say neither "yea" nor "nay," will not even look him in the face—in response to his piteous appeal for "just one ray of kindness, else his heart must break!"

"Hearts do not break so easily, Mr. Dundas," says Lady Margaret, with a waggish gleam in her merry eyes.

Nevertheless, she turns towards him at last with a shy, half-tender courtesy, that emboldens him to lay one adventurous hand on her shoulder, and whisper lovingly:

"Maggie, you little witch! don't

keep me in suspense much longer, for I cannot stand it—indeed, darling, I *cannot!*"

The ring of real pain in his low, trembling voice is too much for Maggie Lisle, and with a sudden cessation of all her little airs and graces, she raises her head, looks him straight in the face with her sweet honest eyes, and says, clear and low:

"Oh! don't—*please* don't, Ned—of course I'll marry you if you wish it! I didn't know you cared so much, dear.'

"Not *care* for you! How could I help it, Maggie? Haven't you been

the soul of my soul, and the life of my life, all these past six months? Have I ever lived a moment of my life in which you have no part, since the day when first we met?"

(Here one or two episodes which had occurred during his sojourn in foreign parts occurred to Mr. Dundas's mind with unwelcome force; but who would cast a thought to that black-browed Señorita Inez, or to that blue-eyed, flaxen-haired Lieschen with whom he had beguiled so many a weary hour "unter den Linden," when peerless Lady Margaret, his one

true love until death, was standing by?)

"Maggie, I want you to give me a rose, and I want to give you one too," said Ned Dundas, with solemnity, when a somewhat tardy recollection of her deserted guests had recalled the duties of hostess to Lady Margaret's mind, and they advanced slowly towards the garden-door leading into the entrance-hall. "You shall have a red one, because you were crowned with red roses that day I first saw you—do you remember?—and you must give me a white one, dear, in memory of you as you look

to-night—a very queen in your white rose-crown.'

Laughingly Lady Margaret gathers the rose-buds red and white, and as she gives him the latter, he leans forward and kisses her for the first time on the lips, with the words:

"I swear to keep this rose all the days of my life, in token of the love which shall be yours for ever and ever, darling—so help me God!"

Perhaps it is the moonlight alone which causes Margaret Lisle to look so strangely pale, and no doubt it is the night air, and no presentiment, which makes her shudder so palpably

as she listens to his wild words. But for all answer she kisses her own red rose-bud and places it lovingly in her breast, as she turns away with only the low-spoken prayer:

"God grant it do not fade!"

* * * *

The noon-day sun next morning shone hot and bright on the heads of two young people wandering about in the old Abbey's terraced garden, and so fervent were its rays that a secluded rustic bench, well screened by a beech-tree's spreading branches, was unanimously selected by Lady Margaret Lisle and her companion of

the hour as the best means of protection from the prying glare of both the world and its sun. For not yet had either the one or the other shone upon their dawning love, and the little idyl which had been played out on the terrace yesternight was still a secret to all hearts save theirs alone.

And yet, in spite of the tender memories of this last night's idyl, there seems little of loving-kindness or sweetness reigning now between these two, considering the very exceptionable circumstances in which they are placed; for whilst *he* sits

glum and silent at one end of the bench, with an expression of countenance denoting "nasty temper" to say the least of it, *she* is staring at the sky with a supercilious air of *nil admirari*, and tapping a small foot disdainfully on the mossy sward, as if far above all mundane influences.

"Then I am to understand, Lady Margaret, that you positively refuse to allow me to speak to Lord Palatine before I leave here to-day, or that you in any way consider yourself bound to abide by the promise you made to me last night?" asked

Ned Dundas, after a gloomy pause.

"You can understand what you please, Mr. Dundas," returned Lady Margaret, with superb nonchalance; "and if you can really think so little of me as to believe that I *wished* to throw you over for that dance last night for sake of little Lord Ingots, I have no more to say!" and Maggie's face looked so preternaturally solemn as to suggest the idea that in reality she was ready to burst into laughter at the earliest opportunity.

"Well, I never thought that my

happy dream would so soon be over!" exclaimed Ned Dundas dismally, ramming his hat on to the back of his head with the air of a man to whom despair was as a brother and misery a mother.

"I'm sorry you take it so to heart," said his companion wickedly. "Now I consider that it is *you* who have thrown *me* over, Mr. Dundas. But I am by no means going to wear the willow, let me tell you, for I don't think I could ever learn how to do it gracefully!" and Lady Margaret laughed her sunny laugh of youth and happiness and joy.

A dark flush of boyish rage passed over Ned Dundas's face, as he sprang to his feet with the exclamation:

"So you taunt me with your heartless want of feeling, Lady Margaret! So be it. It is a lesson I shall not easily forget!"

"I don't feel a bit proud of my 'want of feeling,' as you call it, Mr. Dundas," returned Margaret quietly, and with a half-frightened glance at his darkly perturbed face. "But if you can throw me off for sake of some wild and unreasonable fancy which may chance to cross your

mind, it is not for me to beg and pray you not to change it."

For all the proud tone of voice in which the girl speaks, there is a slight quiver of the sensitive lips which plainly tells that the play is rapidly becoming pain. But the clear steady eyes tell no tale, and not a shadow of repentance can her accuser detect in the pale haughty face which is turned so defiantly towards his own.

This is not to be borne. To a naturally hot temper Mr. Dundas unites a love of authority over whatever belongs to him, or that he thinks

belongs to him—so eminently characteristic of the British nation. Therefore, after leaning against the trunk of the friendly old beech-tree for a few moments in gloomy silence, he steps forward and holds out his hand with dignity, as he says:

"Good-bye, Lady Margaret. I am so little to you that to part with me can give you no pain to speak of; so a truce to fine words and false sentiments, and let us 'say farewell and go'!"

A pang of unutterable pain goes through Margaret Lisle's heart. Can it be true, this that he says? Is he

as she listens to his wild words. But for all answer she kisses her own red rose-bud and places it lovingly in her breast, as she turns away with only the low-spoken prayer:

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CHAPTER V.

HOW 'ROYALIST' FELL.

"Did they quail, those steeds of the squadrons light,
Did they flinch from the battle's roar,
When they burst on the guns of the Muscovite,
By the echoing Black Sea shore?
On! on! to the cannon's mouth they stride,
With never a swerve nor a shy,
Oh! the minutes of yonder maddening ride,
Long years of pleasure outvie!

"No slave, but a comrade staunch, in this,
Is the horse, for he takes his share,
Not in peril alone, but in feverish bliss,
And in longing to do and dare.
Where bullets whistle and round-shot whizz,
Hoofs trample, and blades flash bare,
God send me an ending fair as his
Who died in his stirrups there!"

Visions in the Smoke.

as she listens to his wild words. But for all answer she kisses her own red rose-bud and places it lovingly in her breast, as she turns away with only the low-spoken prayer:

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And yet, in spite of the tender memories of this last night's idyl, there seems little of loving-kindness or sweetness reigning now between these two, considering the very exceptionable circumstances in which they are placed; for whilst *he* sits

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"Well, I never thought that my

hope on for ever and aye; for where it looks darkest and blackest now, may be the one bright spot where the clouds will break hereafter. Truly, there are black squares as well as white on the chessboard of Life!

* * * * *

Far away in an Eastern land, this self-same October morning broke fresh and clear after a previous night's rain, giving little warning of how dark its after-day should be.

Ere half its span of hours had run their course, the old vineyard on the sunny slopes of the Chersonese upland re-echoed with clashing and curses,

where once the sound of children's voices and songs from the merry toilers midst its vines had alone been heard. And where once had hung rich purple fruit, mingled with tendrils of vine leaves, fit to wreath the heads of the gods in their Bacchanalian revels, now gleamed the warlike helmets of the Inniskillings and the "beautiful grey horses" of their time-honoured companions in war, as General Scarlett's brigade started on the fateful errand which laid a wreath of undying laurels at the feet of the Heavy Cavalry Brigade.

Away to the left, where the Light

Cavalry Brigade is drawn up awaiting orders, and longing despairingly for the moment to come when it too may have a chance of distinguishing itself in stirring conflict with those opposing dark-grey masses which have been so graphically compared to "dense clouds charged with storm," Ned Dundas is sitting on his horse, chafing and fuming in wild impatience.

And they have not long to wait. The order, now an historical one, is given—the short altercation which follows it is over—and "The Brigade will advance," down the valley of the shadow of death.

Somehow, when once under way, the wild, restless excitement of the last hour or two seems to give way to a sense of stern anxiety and steady resolve; and in his heart Ned Dundas feels far more as if he were riding 'Royalist' simply to hounds, than as if he were taking part in some great deed of "derring do."

He can just catch a glimpse of the first line ahead of them—the conspicuous cherry-coloured overalls of the 11th Hussars, the picturesque Lancers, the quiet, workmanlike uniform of the 13th—all concentrated into one great moving and clanking mass of men

and horses, led by one of whom history asserts that he rode his good white-legged chestnut charger as gaily and steadily that day, as though charging a battery of Russian guns were a thing of no greater moment than charging a Leicestershire "oxer" when hounds were running hard.

But ere many moments have passed, a great change comes. Loud roar out the guns from the Causeway Heights, which Liprandi's grey-coated warriors have made their own; and a dull vengeful thunder re-echoes in answer from the Fedioukine Hills, as from

the eminences on both right and left, death-dealing showers of shot and shell are poured down on the devoted "Six Hundred."

'Royalist' plunges furiously, almost overpowering his rider, as a stray fragment of shell tears an oblique ragged wound in his off-shoulder; but, true to his breeding, he bends quietly under his rider's hand once more and gallops doggedly on, though his blood is streaming fast and the fire of old is dying out in his veins at last.

But the death-ride is nearly ridden now, and already, through the smoke

and confusion in front, can be discerned the brass muzzles of those guns which it had cost so terrible a waste of lives to reach, and the second line is charging into them over the bodies of fallen men and horses, friend and foe.

Ned realizes vaguely that his horse is hit, and that in all probability this means certain death to himself; but, in spite of all, he still feels not one whit more excited than if merely riding to hounds in some good gallop over the grass, an idea which almost receives confirmation when, as the second line goes crashing into the

guns in wake of the first, above the roar and rage of conflict rings out a familiar "View holloa!" cheery and clear.

Ere many minutes have passed, each one of which is charged with many a lost body if not soul, Ned Dundas finds himself returning whence he came; and, in company with many others in the like desperate predicament as himself—riding for bare life across the right flank of Jeropkine's regiment of Lancers, exchanging a sort of running cut and thrust with those who are near enough to molest him. A sudden lance-wound in the

arm causes an unpleasant change in his sensations, and arouses much ill-feeling in his mind apparently; for the sabre-cut which he gives in return is charged with so much fury and malice, as sorely to smite the hapless Russ on whose grey shoulder it falls.

But now the shattered remnants of what was once the Light Brigade are struggling back to the spot from whence, so short a time before, they had sallied forth with all the pomp and glory of war;—with loud clanking of bit-rings and scabbards, with crushing and thundering of hoofs, and

horses tearing and pulling as if glorying in the sport—hearts beating high, faces flushed and anxious—one great and dauntless "forlorn hope" from first to last! *Now* they are returning slowly and sadly in scattered groups, and knots of two and three—faces begrimed with smoke or pale and livid from death-wounds, blood on their horses, blood on their hands, blood everywhere; some staggering along on sorely maimed horses, some toiling on foot; but in each and all there is still the same high heart and dauntless courage which had doomed them to their fate, and which in all

time to come will for ever supply fresh victims to the Juggernaut of "England's mistakes in war" as nobly and ungrudgingly as ever!

Poor 'Royalist' struggled on with the rest, but it was with failing strength and fast-dimming eye, for his hour had come. He made one last desperate effort to get into a slow trot, as his master bent anxiously over him with a low "Are you done, old boy?" that even the awful emergency which they both were in could not make anything else than kind; but it was not to be. Though D'Allonville's gallant Chas-

seurs had silenced the battery on the Fedioukine Hills at last, the guns on the opposite heights still kept up their deadly fire on our returning men, destroying the last chance of many who, either through luck or some kind comrade's assistance, had felt as if they were all but reaching home once more.

And once again, on almost the very spot where he had met with his first wound, is poor 'Royalist' struck. Dying though he may be, the old nature lingers in him yet, and he gives a loud, wrathful snort of rage, but not of fear — bounding high

into the air in impotent protest against this terrible death-dealing foe, only to fall headlong on to the earth again, stretched out in death—one of the many noble and gallant hearts which throbbed out their last breath on the fatal soil of the Tchernaya valley.

END OF PART I.

PART II.

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER.

CHAPTER VI.

EVENING SHADOWS.

"There go the loves that wither,
The old loves with wearier wings;
And all dead years draw thither,
And all disastrous things;
Dead dreams of days forsaken,
Blind buds that snows have shaken,
Wild leaves that winds have taken,
Red strays of ruined springs."

The Garden of Proserpine.

"'Tis not love, Tommy,' says Sir Charles Sedley, 'that doth all the mischief, but constancy. For love is of the nature of a burning-glass which, kept still in one place, fireth—but changed often, it doth nothing.'" — *Sedley's Letters.*

CHAPTER VI.

EVENING SHADOWS.

YEARS have passed by, and many a spring and summer, autumn and winter, have come and gone—leaving no record behind them save of some old face missed, some new face born, and many a "silver thread among the gold."

In the darkening twilight of a summer's day, a woman stood at one of

[illegible] bay windows of a house in [illegible] Square, warning with a somewhat [illegible] gaze the crowd of [illegible] carriages, cars and foot-passengers hurrying onward restlessly in the street below.

Looking at her as she stood there in the shadowy twilight, with her head resting lightly against the window-frame, and hands clasped idly before her, Time had dealt gently with Margaret Lisle. Few and far between were the lines on her quiet proud face; but it was paler and sterner than of yore, and less wont to be lit up by the mischievous gleams

which had been so marked a feature in the brown eyes of the merry Maggie Lisle of long ago.

Still, there was no use denying it, not even to herself, (and what lies the very best among us are apt to palm off on our own souls with regard to this delicate subject!)—Lady Margaret Lisle *had* grown old. Not so much in outward appearance perhaps, though the slight graceful girl had developed into a tall and grandly formed woman, whilst a look of care and sadness had replaced the sunny childish smile of years gone by; but the inward change was apparent enough.

A great hardness had come over Margaret Lisle's heart, when year after year passed by and brought no tidings from the lost lover of her youth (though the world often spoke of him as a brave and successful soldier, earning honours and decorations on Indian soil). And a still greater hardness had come over Margaret Lisle's soul, as she realized with the bitterness of suffering which springs from every fresh bitter year of sad and weary longing—*how* sweet in truth were the dreams of "what might have been!"

Not that Lady Margaret had pined

and made moan for the sorrow which had stricken her down with a life-long sorrow, her pride had been too great for that, her courage too high. But the wound had been too severe to heal quickly, and so it was that no ray of any other love had penetrated to her heart and soul whilst life was still young and fair. And now it was too late—people were somehow half afraid of Lady Margaret, they said ; she looked so cold and stern, gave them so little encouragement, and suitors for her hand had become few and far between.

No one realized the change which the passing years had brought upon her more vividly than Margaret herself. Not that she felt one whit older *physically* speaking—she told herself—whilst cantering about the bridle-roads round Forndon Abbey on her bonnie bay mare, poor old 'Chevalier's' latest successor, or when breasting some steep hill with her usual free quick step, the envy of many a girl even yet in her teens. But still she *was* altered, she knew—her glass told her that; there was many a line which should not have been, there were curves where the dimples were miss-

ing; and somehow people always called her "Margaret" now, never "Maggie," as they did when she was young.

Lady Margaret's regretful sigh, given to the memory of her lost youth, was quite drowned in the sound of wheels and clatter of hoofs, as a high-stepping roan rattled a smart victoria up to the door below with all the confidence of a horse who is drawing up at an accustomed spot. A minute later the drawing-room door was opened behind her, and a clear joyous voice exclaimed:

"Margaret? Oh, I see you now,

standing there in this owl's light! I have had such a pleasant afternoon—the nicest 'Hurlingham day' we have had this year!"

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself," answered the elder sister heartily. "Tell me all about it before you go upstairs to take your bonnet off! I've been alone for the last two hours, and feel *ennuyé* to a degree which I would seldom own to."

"You poor old thing! I wish you had come too, only I don't know how we could have squeezed our somewhat obese aunt into the

victoria with both you and me," laughed Nina gaily.

"No; Aunt Mopsley wants more than half a carriage as it is. But tell me about Hurlingham — what made it so extra pleasant to-day, Nina?"

"Oh, I hardly know," answered the younger sister hesitatingly. "There were lots of people there—*nice* people, you know—and the polo was amusing, and—and—oh! the tea was good."

Lady Margaret shook her head and laughed.

"I've known all those things happen at Hurlingham before, my dear; *that*

is not the reason you enjoyed yourself so much more to-day than usual! But I won't tease you to tell me any more about it now, for we ought really to go and dress."

"To dress! why, what time is it?" exclaimed Lady Nina, starting up.

"Nearly eight o'clock, and we have to dress for this ball at X—— House between now and dinner, remember."

"Oh, dear, I *can't* dress in that short time—not properly, at least!" moaned Nina, hurriedly collecting her bonnet and gloves prior to departure.

"Why? Is it going to be a gala night as well as a gala day, little girl? And are you anxious to look your very best to-night?" asked Lady Margaret laughingly, rising leisurely to follow her sister to the door.

"Nonsense, Margaret! I don't really know why I made out that I had enjoyed myself so very much to-day, for I can't find any reason for my assertion. But somehow it was livelier than usual, and—and then I had a great treat; for I was introduced to this General Dundas who has just returned from India,

and whom the papers talked so much about, you know; and he seemed so charming and nice, and not a bit stuck-up, and—and—oh! we had tea together at one of those little tables, you know."

Fortunate it was that Lady Nina was too busy in curling and re-curling the blue feathers in her lovely little French bonnet to notice the violent start and involuntary catch of the breath which Margaret Lisle gave at the sound of the well-known name; equally fortunate was it that the coming shadow of night threw a dark veil over the expression of

Margaret Lisle's face, whereon surprise, pleasure, and fear distinctly succeeded each other.

"How does he look?"

The quick, eager question came from her involuntarily.

"Look? How does he *look?* How do I know, Margaret, when I never saw him before?" answered Nina wonderingly.

"Of course, child; I forgot. It was a stupid question to ask."

"Well, you can ascertain all those particulars to-night, Margaret dear," pursued Lady Nina, dancing out of the room with her usual gay, light

step; "for he's going to be at X——House also—at least so he said, when I told him that *I* was going there;" and with a little self-conscious laugh, the beautiful, spoilt younger sister ran upstairs quickly, not heeding the sudden closing of the drawing-room door behind her, as Margaret Lisle turned back into the room which she had just left.

"To see *him*—and *to-night!*" she exclaimed, in a low tone of mingled joy and fear. "It seems like a dream! But the waking will be bitter enough, no doubt. Will he remember our last meeting, I wonder—will he remember

it as well as I do? And will he forgive and forget the old quarrel of long ago, or will the bitter sorrow of past years be made even bitterer to me still?"

Margaret sat on there in the darkness with her head buried in her hands until the chime of a clock roused her to the fact that only a very few minutes were now left her in which to dress for the evening's festivity; and of all nights in her life, this was not the one to choose on which to fail in looking her best.

"Strangely hard to please is My Lady this evening," her maid thought,

when, after ruthlessly condemning a beautiful green-and-white ball-dress, light as sea-foam on sea-green water, and rejecting with equal haste sundry fascinating "arrangements" in grey and pink, she finally hesitated long between the rival claims of a dazzling white dress, fit for a fairy revel, and one of black lace all shimmering with jet.

At that instant there came a knock at the bedroom door, and Lady Nina Lisle entered upon the scene like a vision of light, so beautiful did she look in her creamy white dress, with no ornament save her own golden

hair, braided becomingly round the little fair head.

Often as Lady Margaret had heard her younger sister's beauty praised, and dearly as she liked to look upon her bright, sweet face, its surpassing loveliness had never before been brought so thoroughly home to her as was the case to-night. Without one shadow of envy, without a thought given to the certain eclipse of her own pale light beside so radiant a star, Margaret looked at her sister with almost amazed surprise, and exclaimed with honest eagerness:

"Oh, Nina, that dress is lovely! You look quite perfect to-night, child!"

"I deserve to do so!" answered Lady Nina with a gay laugh. "For all that my hair looks so simple and undressed, it has taken Mélanie more than twenty minutes to get it to keep in the right place, and as for these dresses *à la bébé*, Heaven knows how many strings had to be tied to keep their innocent and natural folds in the proper place!"

"Well, you mustn't grumble at trifles, when the climax of perfection has been gained thereby, Nina," said

Lady Margaret, laying a loving hand on her young sister's shoulder. "No, thank you, Pins—I won't wear the white dress to-night—give me that black one, please." And with a half-sigh Margaret said sorrowfully to herself: "I'm getting too old to wear white now!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE GHOST OF A PAST.

"Have I done with those childish fancies?
They suited the days gone by,
When I pulled the poppies and pansies,
When I hunted the butterfly,
With one who has long been sleeping,
A stranger to doubts and cares,
And to sowing that ends in reaping
Thistles and thorns and tares.

"What might be! The dreams were scatter'd,
As chaff is toss'd by the wind,
The faith has been rudely shattered,
That listen'd with credence blind;
Things were to have been, and therefore
They were, and they are to be,
And will be:—we must prepare for
The doom we are bound to dree."

LINDSAY GORDON.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GHOST OF A PAST.

"SO you're tired of India at last, Dundas!" said a tall soldierly-looking man to his companion, as both stood talking together in a comparatively quiet corner of the gorgeous ball-room of X—— House. "I thought the day would come when your enthusiasm for those coral strands would find its own level!"

"Not at all, my dear fellow. It hasn't been love for an Indian climate, but want of money enough to live in an English one, which has kept me out there of late years, I can tell you! Of course it was all very well at first, when there was lots of work to do, and the chance of something to be got also for doing it; but it's a dreary country at best to my thinking, and I'm devoutly thankful for this appointment which has come in so opportunely to bring me home, even though I'm entering on the sere and yellow leaf now!" and General Dundas laughed

as merrily as a boy in spite of his sage remark.

"Old! who's old in these days?" asked the General's companion with an amused smile. "Not *you*, Dundas, I'll warrant, else you're uncommonly altered from what you were when we both joined the —th Light Dragoons together more than twenty years ago. I never knew any man who had a better knack of getting all the fun that was to be had out of life than you, Dundas."

"Oh, that's been my creed throughout it," laughed the latter lightly. And, in spite of tropical climates, in

spite of his forty-five years — only the iron-grey shade on moustache and hair, and the sunburnt tint left on his cheek, seemed to alter the stately young General of to-day from the gay Light Dragoon of years ago.

"But now I want to ask after a few old friends, Clifford," resumed General Dundas, as the music came to a close at the end of a dance, and made conversation more possible. "First of all, can you tell me whether Lord Palatine is still in the land of the living? I met a daughter of his this afternoon, but did not like to put the question."

"Well, he IS alive, and that's about all," answered Colonel Clifford. "You know he's a very old man indeed now, and never goes out anywhere, so no one sees him. But his daughters are sure to be here to-night; do you know them?"

"I did once," said General Dundas quietly.

"Oh, of course! You've just told me of having met one of them this afternoon—Lady Nina Lisle, I suppose? For Lady Margaret seldom honours society with her presence nowadays."

"Doesn't she? Why not?"

"Well, I really don't know. Some people say she's becoming *dévote*—some people say that it bores her to be always cut out by her lovely young sister—for years ago she was a beauty herself, was Maggie Lisle; but that was after you had left England. I'm not sure even now I don't admire that pale refined face of hers with the glorious dark eyes, more than the inane baby-faced style of beauty of Lady Nina."

"Why has she never married?" And though Ned Dundas had long ago set a seal on the old love, and had buried nearly all memory of it

in many a new one, he awaited his companion's answer with a deeper interest than he was himself aware of.

"My dear fellow, who *can* answer for the caprice of a woman? Anyway, it's not for want of being asked, I'm very sure of that! For many a man (and good fellows too, some of them) has received his *congé* from that unapproachable Galatea; and the Pygmalion who can impart a stir of life to that marble heart of hers has yet to be discovered, like the North Pole!"

General Dundas smiled, and, in a

tone half-sad and half-supercilious, remarked:

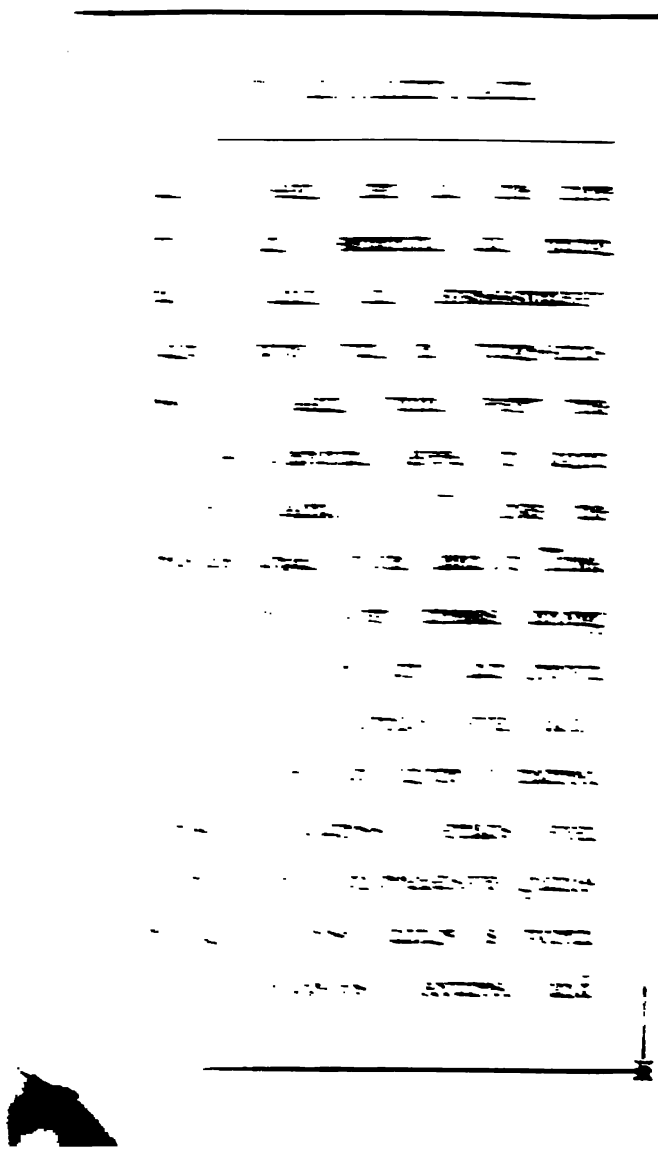
"I don't like your goddesses myself. They are all very well in their proper place, *i.e.*, on a marble pedestal; but give me flesh and blood women, with what *they* would call 'hearts' (though perhaps the possession of the latter might be almost an anatomical question). I never *did* long for the unattainable, it's a desire which involves such a dreadful lot of trouble; and so long as red roses grow and flourish, I'm content for my part to leave search for 'les roses bleues' to

the higher-souled geniuses of this world!"

"Look, Dundas," interrupted Colonel Clifford hastily, "there are the Lisles coming in now, standing right in the doorway. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," and General Dundas riveted his eyes with merciless scrutiny on the tall, dark-haired Lady Margaret, rather than on the beauty of the day, lovely little Nina.

If any man or woman wishes to be cured of that infatuation of their youth, yclept "first love," there is no surer way of succeeding in this



prayers with which our friends, and possibly our own hearts, tried so hard and so vainly once to show us "the folly of it"?

So thinks General Dundas, as his eyes travel slowly over Margaret's pale and rather careworn face, carefully noting the stern set look of the once smiling mouth, the lines which Time has drawn on the once round cheek; and, above all, the world-weary look in the bright eyes of old. And then, with a little inward laugh not quite devoid of bitterness, he murmurs to himself as he crosses the room:

"To think that I once nearly broke my heart over that quiet, faded-looking woman! Surely I must indeed have been young in those days, for only the folly of a boy could magnify that cold pale face into the fitting idol of a 'love's young dream!'"

With quite flattering warmth does Lady Nina Lisle accost her new acquaintance, and as she lays a little snowflake of a hand in his, she turns quickly round and says:

"I don't think you have met my sister yet, so I must introduce you.

General Dundas — Lady Margaret Lisle."

One grave look from out the calm, quiet eyes, a slight bow as to a perfect stranger, and the meeting which Margaret Lisle has dreamt of and pictured to herself for years is already a thing of the past.

As General Dundas laughingly claims her sister's hand for the dance just then forming, in evident pursuance of a promise given that day, Lady Margaret sinks back into the recess made by a large bay-window with seats within it, and tries vainly

to stifle the re-awakened memories of a long-dead past.

Faster and faster crowds each thought and remembrance into her heart; the honest, childish love of long ago, honest enough in spite of its seeming carelessness; the bitter crushing agony which followed in its train, borne with a calm proud resignation all the harder to maintain in that she was so young; the long weary years that had intervened since then, in which heart and hopes grew daily colder and more cold; the glorious young life that had been wasted and spent in unalterable

fidelity to the only love she had ever known—her first and last.

There are many women in the world to whom such constancy seems little short of simple madness—women who take a bite of every fruit which hangs within their reach, from the young and tender greengage to the wrinkled crab-apple in its maturity. But Margaret Lisle is not of these. With the strange quiescence of deep despair, she recognises at once the full measure of her own sorrow; for at the first sound of careless words spoken in the deeply-loved voice of old, the love of long ago sprang up

in her heart again with a fierce wildness unknown to her innocent girlhood's years; and it is almost a groan which escapes from her white-set lips as she passionately murmurs:

"Fidelity is woman's curse!"

Voices fall on her ear like on one in a dream, and she starts up hastily as, unconscious of her presence, Lady Nina Lisle and her late partner take possession of the seats nearest to her corner, but concealed therefrom by a heavy curtain of high-art texture and colouring. Vainly she tries to recover herself sufficiently to make known her presence and face them quietly; but

the deadly pallor of her own face as she catches sight of its reflection in an opposite mirror convinces her that not now at least can the effort be made. The work of years would be undone in one single instant, and Margaret Lisle's proud head laid low in the dust at last!

So she sinks noiselessly back into her curtained seat with a mingled feeling of contempt and self-pity for her own weakness, and tries not to hear that voice, every tone of which makes her pulses throb and tingle afresh.

"So you've hardly ever been in

England more than three months at a time, you say, General Dundas?" inquired Nina's voice, to the sound of a fan's idle movement.

"No, not since the Crimean War broke out, which was when you were a baby, Lady Nina."

"How does he know that? I don't look twenty now," thought Nina to herself.

"And you are come back for good?" she inquired out loud, putting the most flattering touch of anxiety into her voice as she spoke; for in the art of thoroughly refined coquetry Lady Nina Lisle had no equal, and

it pleased her to try and enslave the hero of the hour — this successful young General whose name was just now on every lip.

"I hope it may *prove* for good," answered General Dundas in a low voice full of meaning (long practice had taught him how to pick up most effectually the glove thrown down). "But it *may* prove just the contrary to me—who knows?" And the mixture of recklessness and sentiment in his musical voice was nothing short of perfection.

The unwilling listener behind him shudders, and involuntarily tries to

stop her ears; but regard for *les convenances* prevents even this mode of escape from her torture being practicable.

"How could that be? How can a return home to friends and country, triumphs and success, prove anything else than 'a good time' to the man who can so justly claim them?" asked her little ladyship sentimentally, and inwardly assuring herself that she "was getting on capitally."

"I am very grateful to both my friends and country for all the kindness I have received," returned General Dundas gravely, and for the first time

there was a genuine ring of honesty in his voice. "But of what good would my life be unto me if I took a wife of the daughters of Heth, or, more practically speaking, if I set my heart on a woman who in point of youth, beauty, and every good which this world can give, is as far out of my reach as—as—as—'a bright particular star!'" ("I *always* come to grief when I indulge in astronomy!" thought the speaker to himself placidly; "must be more mundane in my ideas—not soar so high!")

But not a trace of such thoughts was to be detected in his handsome

well," exclaimed her companion, forgetting for the moment his *rôle* and speaking honestly.

Lady Nina looked a little disconcerted at his sudden change of tone, and observed coldly:

"I think it's time to go and see where my sister is, General Dundas, if you will kindly take me?" but in her heart the little coquette valued his allegiance all the more, inasmuch as it did not appear to be so very surely her own as yet.

"Of a certainty, the romance of his youth has never haunted *his* life as it has done *mine!*" murmured the

beside General Dundas, both evidently looking for herself.

"Well, Margaret! where on earth have you been hiding yourself? I've been looking for you this last ten minutes!" said Nina pettishly, as her sister joined the little group. "I'm sure you haven't been dancing, for you look the colour of my white dress; are you ill, or what is it?"

"Ill! did you ever know me to be so in all my life?" asked Lady Margaret gaily. "No, I've been sitting in a draughty window-seat, and feel as cold as a frog; but was

too absent in mind to notice the fact, I suppose, until a succession of shivers awoke me to the interesting fact that I was rapidly catching a catarrh."

"You've been most tiresomely absent in mind all the evening, Margaret," went on Lady Nina with a pretty little contemptuous shrug of her fair shoulders. "However, we've met now only to part once more, for here comes my partner for this valse;" and as the opening bars of "Weit von Dir" fill the room with their pathetic strains, Lady Nina takes her eager partner's arm and is soon

gliding amongst the crowd of dancers which fill it to overflowing.

"Can't we find a seat somewhere, Lady Margaret—a quiet seat, where one is not deafened by the music?" asked General Dundas, watching with interest the pale beautiful face beside him, which after all seemed somehow not so *very* much altered from that of his old true love. The eyes were the same, anyway — those glorious, tender, passionate dark eyes, which had so bewitched him in days of yore!

Margaret Lisle was no coquette. Her pride and her innate truth were

both antagonistic to such a phase of character; but had she been touched by Circe's wand and instilled by that sorceress into the very highest branches of her mysterious lore, she could scarce have succeeded better than she did in achieving the one aim and end of all such accomplishments, *i.e.* the attraction of mankind.

Her careless reply, "Oh, I think I shall remain here. It saves so much trouble always to take the nearest available chair," piqued the good-looking young General not a little. He had usually no difficulty in finding

the fair sex not only ready but quite willing to meet him more than half-way in accepting overtures of that sort; and moreover the bright laughing face which Lady Margaret turned to him left little doubt in his mind as to the sincerity of her indifference.

Poor Margaret! for very pride's sake she must strive to look her brightest and best to-night; but oh! why *could* he not go away and leave her alone? she thought despairingly, as he took the vacant seat beside her; the struggle was becoming harder with each fresh moment's pain.

"Doesn't that band play much too loud?" asked General Dundas irritably.

"I don't suppose the dancers think so," answered his companion with a light laugh, and inwardly wishing that the whole valse might have consisted of a duet between the big drum and the loudest cymbals, so painfully clear and distinct seemed the beating of her own heart in her ear. And why *would* they play that beautiful dreamy valse, with its strain of sadness unutterable? Just now, too, when the sound of any sort of music save what was gayest and loudest seemed almost unbearable to

her over-wrought nerves and failing heart!

A few more commonplace remarks ensued, in which each strove hard to conceal from the other that there *was* anything to conceal, and that an odd, uncomfortable fascination lay in every tone and word spoken in the well-remembered voices of far-off olden times.

Before many minutes had elapsed, Lady Nina joined her sister—then other friends came up—and General Dundas gave up his seat without regret; for an odd fancy had taken possession of his heart, that he hated

to see others win a sweet bright smile from the lips which had once been all his own.

It was a strange fancy, and not altogether an agreeable one to his mind. Was this woman once more to step in and wrest from him the careless lightness of heart which had been his for so many years? Assuredly no! And General Dundas spent the rest of the evening in assiduous devotion at the fair Nina's shrine, not from any particular attraction towards that little queen of coquettes, but because he derived that mysterious pleasure in her society

which can only be described in the words: "near the rose, though not itself."

Lady Margaret watched it all with a resolute face and heart; but the memory of a Hallow E'en night of long ago smote her with a sharp and sudden pang; for it seemed as if in truth these two faces, which had been joined in the mirror of Fate that night, were destined now to "dree their weird" for better or for worse.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YOU WERE ONCE YOUNG YOURSELF."

"Unto my soul I said . . . 'Make now complete
Thy sacrifice by silence. Undeterr'd,
Strike down this beggar heart, that would be heard,
And stops men's pity in the public street;
A mendicant for miserable meat!
Nor pay thy vassal, Pain, with any a word,
Lest so the deed thou doest should be slurr'd
By shameful recompense, and all unsweet.
Uncover not the faces of thy dead.
Slay thy condemnèd self, and hide the knife.
And even as death, compassionating life,
With gracious verdure doth the graves o'erspread,
So hide beneath a smiling face the whole
Of thine unuttered misery, O my soul!'"

OWEN MEREDITH.

CHAPTER VIII.

"YOU WERE ONCE YOUNG YOURSELF."

TWO days have come and gone since the ball at X—— House took place, and once more Lady Margaret is standing before her mirror clad in gorgeous array; for this evening she and her sister are bound to attend an entertainment given by a relative of their own, and one, moreover, who is also intimately acquainted with the hero

[illegible]

[illegible]

her look like a very queen of light; and the shimmer of diamonds on arms and throat served to enhance the brilliancy of her toilette. A bright, animated expression lit up the wearer's pale face too into absolute beauty; for there are but few women in the world to whom the consciousness of being well-dressed and looking their very best does not lend an added beauty and brightness.

"Why, Margaret, are you dressed already?" exclaimed the voice of Lady Nina in the doorway, in astonished tones.

"Yes, quite dressed, Nina. Pins has been gone this last ten minutes. Will my dress do?" And with a half-smile of conscious triumph at her own appearance, Margaret turned and faced her sister.

"Yes, it's nice enough," said Nina condescendingly, who never could see or pretend to see the slightest beauty in anything not appertaining to herself. "But I'm *awfully* disappointed that you've put on your diamonds, for I was just coming to beg you to lend them to me for to-night; my dark green dress looks so quiet and dowdy beside yours!" And Nina

looked the very picture of disconsolate sulkiness, in spite of her seraphic style of beauty.

Margaret made no answer. Any other night than this she would only too gladly have given the very gown off her back to please little Nina, and the coveted diamonds would for certain have been pressed upon the latter with hasty frankness. But to-night, when she wanted to look her very living best, and when her mirror told her plainly how the dazzling stones set off her beautiful dress to highest advantage, it *was* hard to give them up!

Seeing a look of hesitation dawning on her sister's face, Nina Lisle advanced to where she stood and laid one arm around her lovingly ; whilst in coaxing tones she said :

"Just this once only, Margaret! You can guess why I want to look my prettiest to-night ; and it's all the same to you, I know, or I wouldn't ask for them. Just look at my dark dowdy dress, and think what you would feel in my place to-night! Remember, you were once young yourself, Maggie!"

An odd feeling, as if some one had given her a traitorous stab, smote

Lady Margaret's heart, but quietly she divested her arms and throat of the coveted diamonds and laid them in her sister's hand; and not a tremor was in the low clear voice as she said kindly:

"Take them, dear; they will look far better on you than on me, I think."

"Oh, thank you, Margaret! That is really kind of you," exclaimed Nina joyously, and hastily clasping the glittering jewels on to her own neck and arms as she spoke. "I felt sure you wouldn't mind, but it's very, *very* kind of you all the same."

And a warm kiss of gratitude from the beauty's coral lips brought the old brightness back to Margaret's face and heart at once.

"I'll wear your pearls instead, Nina," she said gaily, "if you will fetch them for me. They will go quite as well with my white dress as the diamonds, I think." And Lady Nina flew to obey the behest with all the graciousness that springs from the assured success of one's own plans.

It was still early in the evening when the sisters arrived at the house of their relative, who was by way of

being assistant chaperon to Lady Nina at least, though Margaret stoutly maintained this idea to be an insult to herself and her own maturer years. And no sooner were they announced, than the relative in question, Lady Mopsley, flew to Margaret and besought her at once to sit down and sing a song.

"What, now this minute, aunt?" exclaimed poor Margaret in dismay, casting a hasty glance round the half-filled room as she spoke, and noting the emptiness of the large drawing-room beyond, which was all cleared for dancing.

"Yes, *at once*, my dear," said Lady Mopsley firmly. "If I can't keep people amused for another half-hour my whole evening will be a failure! It's that horrible Mrs. Parvenuye who lives in the next street that has upset all my arrangements. The woman has got a dance herself to-night, and has actually asked almost all *my* friends too! Imagine such insolence on her part, and her father nothing more than a common tradesman, my dear! However, it's no use talking; I suppose the people will come on from her house to mine by-and-by, when they've had enough of her and

her gilded upholstery (you never saw such a house, my dear—such vulgarity of taste—quite depressing!), and till then I think a few songs will help to enliven us all a bit; for it's no use trying to begin dancing when you have only got two young men to divide amongst twenty-three anxious women! And now, my dear Nina, don't you go and appropriate those solitary two men all to yourself, if you please," continued the hostess severely, having a well-authenticated fear of her niece's powers of attraction. "I've asked General Dundas here on purpose to meet you, so I hope

subjugate still further her nascent admirers.

"Now, my dear Margaret, you must not refuse to sing, dear child! I really cannot allow it. And do you know, you're looking uncommonly well to-night, my love—quite in your old looks—isn't she, Nina?"

"Margaret always does look well, I think," said Lady Nina calmly. The good looks of others was never a source of jealousy to her, it seldom is to really handsome women; only she couldn't get up any enthusiasm on such a subject—that was impossible.

"Well now, my dear, begin."

Lady Margaret obediently divested herself of her gloves and accompanied her hostess to the piano. She did not care whether she had to sing or not, and music was preferable to talking in her present frame of mind, so, ere many moments had passed, her low sweet contralto voice was ringing through the room, and General Dundas, as he entered the doorway that very instant, stood nearly opposite to the singer, whose face he watched intently whilst listening to Charles Kingsley's charming words:

"I once had a sweet little doll, dears,
The prettiest doll in the world,
Her cheeks were so red and so white, dears,
And her hair was so charmingly curled.
But I lost my poor little doll, dears,
As I played in the heath one day;
And I cried for her more than a week, dears,
But I never could find where she lay.

I found my poor little doll, dears,
As I played in the heath one day;
Folks say she is terribly changed, dears,
For her paint is all washed away,
And her arms trodden off by the cows, dears,
And her hair not the least bit curled;
Yet for old sake's sake she is still, dears,
The prettiest doll in the world."

CHAPTER IX.

A STARLIT NIGHT.

"Those that beyond sea go, will sadly find,
They change their climate only, not their mind."

Translation from Horace.

"I am touched again with shades of early sadness,
Like the summer-cloud's light shadow in my hair:
I am thrilled again with breaths of boyish gladness,
Like the scent of some last primrose on the air.
And again she comes, with all her silent graces,
The lost woman of my youth, yet unpossest:
And her cold face so unlike the other faces
Of the women whose dead lips I since have prest."

Fata Morgana.

CHAPTER IX.

A STARLIT NIGHT.

AMONG the chorus of thanks and gracious platitudes which followed Lady Margaret's song, one voice alone was missing. Still standing far back in a dark corner near the door, General Dundas was watching her face more intently than ever, with a dreamy fascination which seemed to bring back the days of his boyhood, so long ago.

There was the vision which had enslaved his youthful manhood in years gone by—*there* was still the pale proud face which had condemned him to exile and despair—there, too, were the radiant eyes which had smiled into his so lovingly and tenderly on that moonlit night in June five-and-twenty years ago!

How well he remembered it all still! The first time he ever saw her—sitting on the old garden-wall and crowned with roses red — so bright, merry, and fair; almost the very tune which had haunted him on that by-gone day, seemed sounding

in his ears even now. And then the ride next morning on 'Royalist,' (poor 'Royalist,' the beginning of whose end began that day!)—the merry gallop over the grass, in the wake of the fleeting pack—the dumb, ecstatic enjoyment of the quiet ride home which followed—all, all came back to his memory as if it were but yesterday!

And lastly—the evening of Lady Margaret's birthday ball—the radiant vision of girlish beauty, pure as the snow-white wreath of roses which crowned her head that night—the short passionate love-scene on the

so bright and gay, so tender and true?

With a start and a heavy sigh, as if trying to shake off the visions of the past, General Dundas roused himself at last to perceive that the room had become quite crowded now, and that a host of dancers were already whirling in the mazy dance, through the open door which led into the ballroom.

Quick decision had always been the characteristic of Ned Dundas. It had mainly contributed to his fame as a soldier, it was now to influence the making or marring of his life. As

he entered the ball-room his eye sought anxiously for but one face there, and when at last he found it, he did not hesitate an instant, but went straight to where Lady Margaret Lisle was sitting in a quiet corner, vainly trying to stave off many an invitation to dance from importunate partners. "She was not in the humour for it," she said laughingly, "so it was no use asking her. People couldn't dance well unless their heart was in their feet."

Certainly, she looked singularly well to-night in her glittering white dress, which lent brightness to the

dark hair and eyes above it; and her regal stature singled her out prominently from the crowd of lesser women around her. But perhaps no one in all the world had ever seen so strangely beautiful an expression as that which passed like a flash of light over her pale proud face, when General Dundas bent quietly over her and offered her his arm with the words:

"Come to where we can speak to each other quietly. I *must* tell you all I want to say, Lady Margaret, if you will hear me now as you would have done once long ago?"

She rose without a word, and together they proceeded to the now forsaken drawing-room, in the farthest corner of which was discovered a secluded sofa, all that the most timid heart could desire.

"Lady Margaret," began the stately young General, in a somewhat small voice it must be admitted, "how little you have altered since the last time we met — so many years ago that perhaps you have quite forgotten it?"

"No, I remember it well," answered his companion quietly.

General Dundas gave a quick

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"No, I remember it well," answered his companion quietly.

General Dundas gave a quick

glance at her face. Was she in reality as calmly indifferent as she looked, and had he lost the power to move her for ever and aye?

"If you *have* forgotten, I have *not!*" he goes on hotly. "I'll own that I never thought to make a fool of myself again for the sake of any woman on earth; but the past has awoke in my heart once more to the utter detriment of the present! You are no longer the cold, proud woman who bowed to me as to an utter stranger only a few short nights ago—to me you are my own lost love, my first and truest and best, the

heart once more, never again to lose it.

A sudden thought strikes her.

"Do you remember some words you said that night?" she asks in a hurried, half-fearful tone. "And the rose I gave you for a remembrance of the same?"

"Yes. I swore to keep the rose and to love you for ever and ever, Maggie—I remember it as if it were but yesterday! And you too, darling, do you remember how you took the red rose I gave you and kissed it and put it in your breast? Ah, love! where is it now?"

"I have it still," murmurs Lady Margaret with a shy sweet smile; "and yours?"

For one instant an expression of hopeless perplexity crosses the features of General Dundas. Then, with admirable presence of mind (and just as their *tête-à-tête* is interrupted by a sudden influx of dancers, trying to cool their heated countenances in the fresher air of less crowded rooms), he starts up, and gives her his arm as he whispers low:

"You shall have it on the self-same day when you give me back your

own, and give me my wife into the bargain, Maggie."

But into that young General's heart entered a serious despair, and far into the morning hours did he sit tearing his hair morally, if not physically, and uttering many strange and awful oaths; whilst on the calm still air floated in accents of poignant anguish the words: "Now, where the *devil* did I put that rose?"

CHAPTER X.

BRIGHT MORNING.

"Who will hold dear the ashes of those days
Burn'd out on altars deem'd no more divine?
Rests there of thy soul's wealth enough to raise
A new God's shrine?

"Who will forgive thy cheek its faded bloom,
Save he whose kisses that blanch'd rose hath fed?
Thine eyes the stain of tears, save he for whom
Those tears were shed?

* * * * *

"Then, if the flush of love's first faith be wan,
And thou wilt love again, again love me,
For what I am—no saint, but still a man
That worships thee."

A Remonstrance.

branches, and whistling softly to himself an old English tune of long ago.

How many years was it since Ned Dundas, then a merry cornet of the Light Dragoons, had ridden down that broad highway which led him to Forndon Abbey and to his fate? Never since then had he again beheld it, and many a memory of olden time came crowding before him now.

Lady Margaret Lisle he had not seen for months—not since the memorable night on which they had once more broken the ice, so many frozen years in strength. When he had

called at their house next morning, he found that Lord Palatine had been taken most dangerously ill in the night; and on the latter's partial recovery his daughters had anxiously hurried him off to the German baths recommended by his doctors. Also, General Dundas's own many engagements had likewise interfered to prevent their meeting again, until now that Lord Palatine's health was sufficiently restored to permit of his returning home once more.

Nor had he gained much by the two or three letters which he had anxiously penned to his absent fair

one. True, each one had been answered with scrupulous courtesy; but a cloud seemed still to rest on his love's horizon, and that the fortress must be stormed and taken by a *coup de main*, and no longer by gentle strategy, seemed a self-evident fact to the young General's decisive spirit.

So now, taking advantage of an official visit which brought him down to those very barracks where he had been quartered in his youth, and from whence he had ridden out so gaily to meet his fate one summer's day, five-and-twenty years ago, he deter-

mined on seeing Margaret Lisle once more, and getting his answer fair and straight, for "yea" or "nay."

How well he remembered that hot summer's day of bygone years, when the road had seemed so interminably long, and the object of his ride so utterly devoid of interest! Well, he could scarce say the same now; and an anxious frown disturbs for a moment his sunburnt handsome face.

"Will it be 'yes' or 'no'?" he murmurs to himself, when the old English tune has reached its final note at last; "will she be the kind,

frank, honest Maggie Lisle of long ago to myself, as well as true to her own dear heart; or will she again be the cold, disdainful woman whose face looked so strangely like that of the scornful girl who sent me out to face the world with a broken heart, so many a year ago? I got over it, certainly—the work that followed that time was a very likely cure for either the pleasures of heaven or the pangs of hell; but there has always been the echo of it in my heart, like a tune which is for ever half in one's head and yet never quite correct. Well, the music is printed now, and

lying all plain and clear before me; no more discordant notes shall mar its sweetness. But that *damned* rose —*that* took some getting over! I'm glad, though, that I didn't accept Bob Clifford's offer to 'take one of his,' though the old scoundrel swears he has no end of decayed vegetable matter of that sort to spare. No, I have honestly confessed that *my* rose is now in heaven, or somewhere else; and Maggie is bound to forgive me for my honesty's sake. That's the best of women; they always like a repentant sinner better than an unrepenting saint. Hullo! what's that?

The cry of hounds, I'll swear! Yes, by the powers there they are! Streaming down the hill towards me too. By Jove, I wonder if I've headed the fox!"

The heart of Ned Dundas beats with a fear which only sportsmen can know, and one to which even many years' residence in India has not made him callous. But quite needlessly does he hide himself and his horse behind a sheltering blackthorn fence. Long ere the pack can reach the great high road whereon he has drawn up, awaiting results with breathless interest, the leading hounds turn sharp to the

right and throw themselves through a brushwood fence, falling over each other in their wild, eager haste ; then their voices resound once more in one united loud fierce cry, as they see their victim sinking before them. There is a strange sudden silence, then a short quick worry, and "Whoohoop!" rings out on the frosty autumn air, re-echoing far and near with fell delight.

"By the number of men who were there when they ran into him, that unwary fox-cub cannot have given them much of a run," said General Dundas to himself in sage reflection.

"I declare, if they draw again I'll have a cut in! Not that this old war-horse of mine has ever seen any fence save the ditches intersecting the 'Long Valley,' but I dare say he'd have a try," he added, with a somewhat doubtful glance at his veteran charger's expressive countenance, as the latter dozed peacefully in the sun with one hind-leg at rest, and an air of utter unconsciousness of the excitements of the chase, as if truly he "cared for none of these things."

"You are well named 'Gallio,' you brute!" said General Dundas fiercely,

giving the worthy old horse a dig in the ribs that made him open both eyes at once and stand up to "attention" in his best and most imposing manner, suggestive of an idea that the martial banner known as the "saluting-flag" were floating proudly o'er his head.

But now the vulpine funeral rites are over, each puppy has been lauded and praised according to his or her deserts; and the small field of horsemen, horses, and hounds wend their way slowly back in the direction from whence they came; but whether to draw again or simply

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to return home, are no longer questions of interest to General Dundas, for his eyes are riveted on one figure alone.

As the hounds move off, a lady in a dark-grey habit and riding a neat bay mare bids good-bye to those nearest to her, and rides quietly away by herself in the direction of Forndon Abbey. One glance is enough for the eagle-eyed General, and in another moment the stately 'Gallio' is tramping majestically alongside the bonnie bay mare; whilst a well-known voice speaks close to Lady Margaret's ear:

"Did I not prophesy once long ago, that we should see the end of a run together as well as the beginning, Lady Margaret?"

And so once more they ride on together in the sunshine of a bright October day—*he* pleading hard for a renewal of the old love and trust of long ago—*she*, already half won, fighting down for the last time that demon of Pride which has helped so sorely to wreck their lives in the merry noontide of long ago, and which is striving hard even now, but striving vainly, to drown the

anxious loving tones which plead so earnestly :

"For old sake's sake, Maggie—for old sake's sake!"

THE END.

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